

**Probation Services Task Force  
Roundtable Discussion Notes  
State Coalition of Probation Officers (SCOPO) Meeting  
April 27, 2001  
Bakersfield, CA**

Task Force Members/Staff:

Hon. Frank Ochoa, Audrey Evje, Maureen O'Neil

Approximate No. of Participants: 17

**Themes:**

- *Hiring and retention issues due to low salary and benefits*
- *CPO needs more autonomy*
- *Reception of grant money results in a reduction in general funds from the BOS*
- *POs should have input into selection of CPO*
- *Support for TCF model with local oversight*
- *Need minimum educational standards for CPOs*
- *Need more resources for adult probationers*
- *Need for more stable funding source*
- *Define probation's role*
- *Probation officer safety*

**Deputy Probation Officer**

- The task force should look at the ability of probation to attract personnel.
  - County has a 26% vacancy rate; need 25-27 more Pos but difficult due to salary and benefits issues. Probation can't compete with other law enforcement agencies
  - Rigid psychological testing results in a small applicant pool, and benefits are not competitive
  - Pos are required to have college degrees, sheriffs don't but they receive a 5% salary boost if they have a degree; probation doesn't.

**Deputy Probation Officer**

- The CPO doesn't have enough autonomy to push for funding for the selection process of DPOs and recruitment
- Need for a new selection process that gives the CPO more autonomy

**Deputy Probation Officer**

- All county probation departments have different budgets and focus
- All CPOs are different, as well as their mandates

- Politics causes many problems and anxiety
  - Feels CPOs have lost sight of probation's goals and role

## **DPO**

- Interested in having task force look into facilities issue
- Has many staff vacancies at the Juvenile Hall
- Recruitment and retention problems;
  - Lose individuals to state and federal law enforcement agencies due to higher salary and benefits packages
  - Less-experienced and educated pool of employees
  - Turnover very high – leave as soon as they are trained
  - Earn less if working full-time as opposed to part-time, due to benefits
- No incentives to stay in probation department and move up the line – incentive to leave exists
- Run 70% non-DPOs in Juvenile Hall
- Facilities running at 150-200% capacity
  - Will get more beds, might help a bit but they are taking a band-aid approach; only have enough staff to plug the holes
- Impossible to maintain staffing requirements in institutions, hard to retain
- Changes in facilities population: more 5150s, more drug- and alcohol-addicted children

## **DPO**

- “Defining Success” doesn’t work: definition based on many things, recidivism, etc.; battle over what makes a successful program
  - “Models” of success don’t work – often, they declare a 100% success rate because they don’t fail anyone
- Original definition of probation was to help people; now, it is a dumping ground for people who don’t go to jail
- Can’t treat all probationers the same because some are very dangerous – must define who clients are and the role of probation.

## **DPO**

- Probation receives 26% of its budget from general funds – the rest is federal money
- Originally, probation was able to intervene so people don't commit more crimes; now, POs are cops or social workers – they can't intervene so people don't commit more crimes.

#### **DPO**

- Probation's main job is to supervise felony probationers
  - 94% of clients are felons
  - Can't get too wrapped up in special projects

#### **DPO**

- In addition to felony probationers, probation also needs to supervise and rehabilitate misdemeanants so they don't get further into the system.

#### **DPO**

- Problem: programs are designed to attract money, result is that money is diverted from other areas of the department, or other programs will be abandoned because resources are needed for the program that got funded
- Probation has to chase grants; we need a stable funding source
- Institutions are chronically overcrowded
- Received a grant for a new facility, so the BOS reduced their general funds \$ - those funds are necessary
- If a move is made to a TCF model, don't take away local oversight, don't abandon programs, and don't force them to hire certain types of employees
- Appointment of CPO is a problem in their county; the CPO takes orders from the courts but is funded by the BOS

#### **DPO**

- CPO is appointed by the court – county has a good relationship with the court and the BOS is supportive in salary and benefits
- Department has captured many grants, so the BOS takes away their core funds; need for a stable funding base
- If move to state model, wants to be paid a state employee's salary

#### **DPO**

- Over the last 20 years, general funds funding has decreased from 80% to 20%
- If move to a state model, need a plan for when officials change offices – what happens to funding?

- Have received grant money for more beds in facility, but can only fill them with people with certain characteristics – can no longer have pre-court detention

#### **DPO**

- Has been an increase in the number of employee organizations, but no organization exists to represent county employees
- Need employee input in selection of CPO
- Need for a central agency to iron out differences between counties (i.e. if 18 year olds can be placed in juvenile hall, etc.)
- Should look at Connecticut – Have a unified police department
- We have a state parole department; we should look at that model since salaries and benefits are uniform throughout the state
- Need to look at what doesn't work – example of how Prop 36 came about

#### **Lobbyist**

- SCOPO carried a bill a few years ago that required minimum standards for CPOs; was defeated by CPOs because many wouldn't meet the requirements
  - Need minimum education standards for CPOs
- It is unfortunate that minorities with BA degrees cannot be found to be POs – salary issue

#### **DPO**

- Educational requirements have decreased because of hiring and retention problems
  - Salaries and benefits are low
  - Probation losing staff to state parole and federal probation

#### **DPO**

- Many hiring and retention problems, so have lowered standards for probation aides (make home calls); they only need an AA degree.
- The make-up of kids in Juvenile Hall is very different than 30 years ago; 30-40% of kids are taking psychotropic medication to control their behavior.
- Rampant overcrowding at CYA – dangerous for officers, high-risk situation
- Need to address facilities issue
- 1994-1999: 35% retention rate of employees; spent millions in training people who left the department

- POs not social workers anymore; often in dangerous situations, have 85% felony caseloads – need to be armed.
- Caseload overload dreadful – just putting out fires; caseloads of 600-700/officer
- Need to standardize services statewide, then allow for local discretion for some programs
- Role has changed: officers are armed and work with the police on the street

#### **DPO**

- CPO was appointed to Assistant CEO, so the BOS has been appointing temporary chiefs to serve 2 year terms; need to appoint a permanent CPO

#### **DPO**

- Recruitment and retention very difficult; many officers transfer to federal probation or state parole or other counties.
  - Some upper-level managers have taken jobs as DPOs in other counties – doesn't make sense.
  - Low retention due to CPO, who is a taskmaster; the union wants to get rid of the CPO but the judges and the BOS supports
- Need more resources for adults, have too many banked caseloads

#### **DPO**

- Preponderance of funding goes to juveniles because probation chases grants

#### **DPO**

- Fallacy exists that you prevent adult crime by stopping juvenile crime, since most adult criminals start committing crimes at age 25

#### **DPO**

- The current system does not work well because no stable system exists – fluctuates based on funding
- Need to define probation's role
- TCF hasn't had much of an effect on probation yet; perhaps more stable due to court unification
- Probation's role has changed county by county, CPO by CPO, legislative term by legislative term
- Moving to court-ordered collaboration with law enforcement
  - 75% of most departments are armed
- PO safety big issue

## **DPO**

- The public doesn't understand probation's role because it differs so much between counties
- Assumption that system works is not necessarily valid
  - Assumption that juvenile system works but there is a waiting list of 200 to serve JH time; the system is not effective if they don't do their time immediately because then juveniles don't understand why they're being punished.
  - The public assumes that probation gets enough funding to do their jobs, and that when a judge makes an order, it is carried out by probation; this often doesn't happen.
- No standard of supervision
- Too busy putting out fires
- POs should have a role in the selection of the CPO

## **DPO**

- No line staff are armed in county – very dangerous

## **DPO**

- A study was conducted and asked if in anything has really changed in probation over the last 30 years. Conclusion was that focus hasn't really changed.
  - Innovative programs are really just repeats from the 1970s (e.g. probation officers on campus)
- Need more POs
- Grants are too restrictive and cause conflict within the department; give money for certain programs that the entire department should have
- Lack of consistency in how departments are funded and directed

## **DPO**

- Standardization of CPO very important; CPO doesn't know who he answers to right now because it is always changing
- Salary discrepancy exists between probation and sheriff's departments
- Juvenile gangsters more dangerous today
- Need more educational requirements of DPOs
  - Bill provides \$1500/year for education for police officers

